Appendix B

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The Tatars and the October Revolution

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Before undertaking a study of the role of the Tatars in the socialist revolution in Russia one should call to mind, if only briefly, the level of their social and political development before the October Revolution.

The history of the revolutionary movement among the Tatars can be divided into two periods: (1) the nationalist period, from 1905 to the February Revolution, and (2) the democratic, petit bourgeois period between the February Revolution and March 1918, when the "democratic" petit bourgeois intelligentsia was crushed by the combined forces of the Tatar and Russian proletariats. These two phases were directly dependent on political and social conditions which existed in Russia as a whole.

The waves of the Revolution of 1905 left their mark on the social, political, and cultural life of the Tatars; it shook the already weakening patriarchal structure of their society, leaving them open to ideas of the socialist revolution.

Thus we witness the awakening of a nation oppressed by czarism, condemned to cultural and economic degeneration and even to extinction. New forces, freed from oppression, were set in motion and new paths of development were impatiently sought after.

In the large Tatar centers of Orenburg, Kazan, and Astrakhan, newspapers and magazines were published in the national language. Tatar literature and

Tatar theatre were born and a new secular school system replaced the archaic traditional religious schools: the *medressehs* and the *mekteps*.

Young writers made their appearance in literature and in literary criticism. The question of the emancipation of women was taken up by the press and in literature, and, after a tenacious struggle, Tatar women gained access to schools, society, and the theater. True, all this happened within the restricted limits authorized by the czarist regime, but even under these conditions, emancipation played a very significant revolutionary role.

During this period all social and political activity took place under the banner of national renaissance of the Tatars. A fierce struggle was taking place on the subject. The revolutionary faction of Tatar society comprised of young people and students, especially those who had received a European (Russian) education, saw the salvation of the Tatar nation to lie in the acceptance of Western European culture and in the radical destruction of all that was old and outdated, of all that hindered their initiation into that culture.

In the beginning, the camp of their opposition included only hardened fanatics, defenders of the ancient forms of Tatar social life. But progressively, as this movement spread and gained in strength, those who only recently had been "innovators" and "revolutionaries" came over to swell the ranks. Already at the time of the February Revolution three tendencies in Tatar social life could be distinguished: (1) the *qadymists*, avowed reactionaries who edited the magazine *Din ve Magisat* at Orenburg and who were allied with organizations such as Soyuz russkogo naroda ("Union of the Russian People") and Sirat al-Mustaqim ("Association for the Salvation of Muslims"), directed by the last prerevolutionary mufti of the Russian interior and of Siberia, the monarchist Bayazidov. This group waged battle against the revolutionary movement through their intermediary, the czarist police. (2) The moderate intelligentsia and the liberal bourgeoisie, centered on the one hand around the newspapers *Quyash* and *Yulduz* of Kazan and the *Tormush* of Ufa (the moderate group) and, on the other hand, around the newspaper *Vaqt* of Orenburg (less moderate). (3) The revolutionary intelligentsia centered around the newspapers *Il* and *Süz* of Ayaz Iskhaki and of *Ang*, published at Kazan by Galimjan Ibragimov, and so on.

It is evident that, given the conditions of the times, Tatar political thought could not go beyond certain limits; alone, it was incapable of resolving the problems raised by history. These problems could only be resolved by the revolution—that which history itself would confirm in time to come.

Until the February Revolution, the social and political objective of the Tatars was national renaissance. At the time of the February Revolution this objective was replaced by that of national independence. The latter was at

times construed as national cultural autonomy, and at other times as territorial autonomy in the form of an independent state, the population of which would have a Tatar and Bashkir (Idel-Ural) majority. This claim was put forth clearly and concisely at the "constituent congresses" and Tatar conferences beginning with the First Pan-Russian Congress of Muslims (May 1917 at Moscow) up to the Second Pan-Russian Congress of Muslims at Kazan.

The petit bourgeois Tatar democracy feverishly prepared itself for this "independence." All the "pan-Russian" organizations were in its hands: the Executive Committee of the Pan-Russian Muslim Central Council (Ikomus) was presided over by the famous Menshevik Caucasian Ahmed Bey Tsalikov; the Pan-Russian Muslim Army Council (Harbi Shura) was at its service, not to mention the Milli Idare (National Board of Tatars of the Volga and of Siberia); and the Millet Mejlisi (National Assembly) convened at the time of the October Revolution.

Preparations for independence proceeded on the military as well as on the political level. The SR Tatars, Ayaz Iskhaki and Tuktarov, allied with the KD, such as Sadri Maksudov, "worked" the Tatar intelligentsia, the women, and the *mullahs*, while the Mensheviks allied to the nationalists "organized" the Tatar soldiers. Everywhere, on the front and in the rear, national Muslim (Tatar) units were formed: companies, regiments, squadrons, and so on. These units were concentrated at Kazan, Ufa, Orenburg, and partly at Astrakhan.

During and after the October Revolution all these bodies rose against us. Certain ones tried to equivocate, but as their maneuvers came to naught, sooner or later they had to show their hostility to the proletarian revolution.

From before the October Revolution, the "Ikomus" and the "Harbi Shura" had drawn closer to Kerenskii. At the time of the offensive of the wild division of Kornilov on Petrograd, the Ikomus played a dominant role in slowing its progress. At the time of the coup d'état of October at Kazan the leaders of the Harbi Shura allied themselves with the provisional government: they entered its "Revolutionary Committee" and sought to pit Muslim units against the insurgents. The National Assembly directed by Sadri Maksudov also adopted a hostile position. When the leftist faction of the assembly directed by the SR leftist Tatars and Bashkirs insisted on the recognition of Sovnarkom and wanted to send a congratulatory telegram the assembly refused.

At this point a new stage in the social and political life of the Tatars began. Already at the First Pan-Russian Muslim Congress at Moscow (May 1917) a leftist faction had appeared, directed by socialist leftist Muslims, which was to play an important role in the Tatar revolutionary movement.

At the Second Pan-Russian Muslim Congress, reassembled at the end of July at Kazan, the socialist Tatars of the Left already seemed an organized force. On the day the congress was inaugurated the leader of the Tatar socialists of Kazan (SD Bolsheviks), comrade Mulla-Nur Vahitov, gave an important speech against the KD and the social-opportunist Tatars, while the leftist SD, directed by Galimjan Ibragimov, showed themselves very active in the Left wing of the congress.

When the coup d'état of October broke out, the socialist Tatars of the Left already represented a perfectly stable revolutionary faction. Most of the members of the Muslim (Tatar) Socialist Committee belonged to the First Revolutionary Staff of Kazan formed during those days in October (Mulla-Nur Vahitov, M. Sultan Galiev, K. Yakubov, and Ya. Chanyshev) and later played an important role.

On their side, the SR of the Left, grouped around the newspaper *Algan*, worked actively at Ufa.

After the liquidation of the Constituent Assembly, the Mensheviks and the SR Tatars adopted a violently hostile position vis-à-vis the power of the Soviets (by inciting the Muslims of Russia to armed struggle against Soviet power). The socialist Tatars of the Left saw as their mission the liquidation of pseudorevolutionary Muslim organizations, a task which necessitated a fairly long and arduous struggle.

At Petrograd, close to the Commissariat of the People and Nationalities, the Central Committee on Muslim (Tatar) Affairs of the Russian Interior and of Siberia was formed with comrade Mulla-Nur Vahitov, the president of the Muslim (Tatar) Socialist Committee, at its head. The Ikomus was liquidated.

But the most bitter struggle took place at Kazan against the Harbi Shura and at Ufa against the "National Parliament." The fight against the Harbi Shura was directed by the Muslim Socialist Committee of Kazan, which formed Red Guard units composed of Tatar workers and led energetic agitation among the Tatar units of the Harbi Shura, the workers, and the Tatar peasants. The decisive battle between the Harbi Shura and the Muslim Socialist Committee took place at the Second Pan-Russian Muslim (Tatar) Military Congress at Kazan in February and March of 1918.

There, the Socialist Committee constituted a faction of the Left which included leftist Bolsheviks and SR who played a historic role in the class struggle among the Tatars and the Bashkirs (since the Bashkirs took part in the congress).

In spite of their solid organization, the advocates of "democratic nationalism" were morally defeated at the Congress. (In its resolution concerning the Constituent Assembly, the Congress congratulated itself on its

liquidation.) Feeling defeat to be close at hand, the leaders of the right-wing faction of the congress employed a strategem: profiting from the tactless attitude of certain of our comrades who rebuffed part of the leftist faction, they decided to risk everything, and proclaimed the so-called Idel-Ural State (which included Tatarstan, Bashkiria, the "government" of Ufa, a part of Kirgizia, the Mariis and Chuvash regions). But this desperate ploy did not succeed, for the Sovnarkom of the Republic of Kazan (the "government" of Kazan) decided to arrest the directors of the presidium of the Military Congress, thereby provoking a conflict between the two factions which was finally resolved to our benefit. The congress was dissolved, the military units of the Shura were disarmed, and its partisans were made to renounce the proclamation of national territorial independence of the Tatars.

The burden of the struggle against the National Assembly of the Tatars passed to the SR of the Tatar-Bashkir left at Ufa. No purpose would be served by recalling the importance of this struggle.

If, in the Harbi Shura we had to deal with the military force of the national block of the KD Tatars and social opportunists, the National Assembly represented their political strength and it was necessary to dissipate this strength at any cost, for they claimed to have seized power in the Transvolga and southern Ural regions and even tried to extend their influence to Central Asia. The people of Ufa succeeded brilliantly in this task and the National Assembly was dissolved.

With the liquidation of these bodies came a new phase in Tatar political life: the era of class differentiation. There were two aspects to this: the differentiation of classes in the countryside and the mobilization of the laboring masses in the Red Army.

The first task was assumed by the Muslim commissariats (Tatars and Tataro-Bashkirs), the second by the Central Military College (Tatar) close to the Narkomvoen. These two tasks were closely allied.

In the beginning the local Muslim commissariats played the role of revolutionary staff in the Tatar movement. Not only were they auxiliary political instruments of the local soviets, but they also served, in broader terms, as organs of power in both a political and an administrative sense. They accomplished an immense amount of work on the spot, especially in the areas of agitation, propaganda, and cultural activities. From another angle, work accomplished by the Military College was highly significant. It was aimed in two directions: first, the mobilization of the Tatars in the Red Army and their political education; second, the formation of Red military leaders and of political activists chosen from among the workers and poor peasants.

During its existence, the Central Muslim College was able to form several

Tataro-Bashkir battalions and regiments and two brigades of Tatar riflemen (which could be assimilated into divisions), and this in spite of the almost total absence of a working class. It opened to Muslims (Tatars) political courses and military courses for infantry and cavalry, as well as commanding posts. But its essential work took place on the front, in the political sections of the army. It was there that special sections were founded to satisfy the needs of the Tatars in the Red Army. In the wake of this, the number of Red Tatar combatants increased by leaps and bounds: at the time when the Civil War was at its peak on the Eastern and Turkestan fronts, the proportion of Tatar combatants in the Red Army exceeded fifty percent of the total number of combatants, and in certain units (for example, the Fifth Army) even reached seventy to seventy-five percent. Each Tatar unit had its own story. Suffice it here to recall the first brigade of Tatar riflemen that crossed all of Kirgizia and Turkestan and took part in the revolution at Bukhara, or again the Tatar battalion of reserves of Kazan which provided, in one year alone, seventy marching companies for the single front of Turkestan.

The Tatar combatants of the Red Army became the pioneers of social revolution in the East by carrying the red flag of class struggle to the distant *kishlaks* (villages) of Central Asia, to the *yurts* of Siberia, and to the *auls* of the Caucasus.

The courses for military leaders also played an enormous role in the development of the revolution among the Turks of Russia. In one year and a half, they trained thousands of Red Tatar military leaders for the fronts of Turkestan and the Caucasus.

A great deal was also accomplished in the fields of publishing and education by the Military College, which distributed among the Tatar combatants hundreds of thousands of copies of the newspaper *Qzyl Armiya* and political brochures published by the Central Muslim Military College.

Finally, the Military College put forth a concentrated effort to train specialists. It enrolled several hundred Tatar combatants in different specialized courses for wireless operators, military engineers, officers of the Staff Academy, and so on.

In speaking of Tatar units in the Red Army one should also mention their merits before the revolution. This was how the first Muslim (Tatar) regiment of Kazan, formed by the Muslim Commissariat of Kazan from the old Red Guards of the Socialist Committee, came to play a historic role in the battles against the White guards around Kazan even before the appearance of the Czechoslovaks.

For its part, the Muslim socialist regiment, aided by the Tataro-Bashkir battalion sent from Moscow by the Central Muslim Committee, helped crush

the uprising at Kazan which the "Committee for the Salvation of the Homeland" had provoked, and aided in the liquidation of the staff of the SR leftists who were preparing to attack us.

The situation was similar at Astrakhan. The coup d'état of October had succeeded there thanks to the participation of Tatar units whose steadfastness and whose sacrifices had saved Astrakhan from counterrevolutionary attacks during the darkest days of Soviet Russia. The Muslim Military Commissariat of Astrakhan which had command of the Tatar units had always been on the side of the revolution.

The coal basin of Krivoi-Rog-Donetz supplied tens of thousands of Tatar Red Guards. At the time of the German imperialist offensive against the Ukraine, the units formed of Tatar workers sacrificed themselves in the defense of the soviet power. One single unit of mine workers, organized by comrade Bulushov, contained as many as 6,000 Tatar Red Guards. At the beginning of 1918 this unit covered the retreat of our forces before Kharkov and took part in the bloody battle before Likhaia-Tsaritsyn.

In conclusion it would be appropriate to say a few words about the importance of the Tatar Republic in the development of the social revolution in the East, for the Tatar factor was enormously important. All the cultural forces forged and shaped during this period in Tatarstan would become, in the future, the seeds of cultural development in our still underdeveloped eastern territories.

From this time on, the Urals, Siberia, Central Asia, Khiva, Bukhara, and even far-off Afghanistan sought cultural workers, teachers, journalists, and so on in Tatarstan. In this latter period, there was such a critical shortage of Tatar workers that Tatarstan itself was bled dry.

In drawing up the balance sheet of the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution and of the participation of the Tatars, it should be noted that the working masses and the poorer classes of Tatars did not take part in the revolution, but did help to spread it in the East. We must continue their efforts and infuse new vigor and strength into the revolutionary struggle. The Tatar Republic should be the base of this work. To take up anew the work in Tatarstan, to sustain the comrades already working in this direction, this is the task of the day which the revolution requires of us.